CULTURAL CONTEXT REPRESENTATION IN THE *MERDEKA CURRICULUM* ENGLISH TEXTBOOK: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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A B S T R A C T S

This study explores the representation of cultural contexts in the *English for Change* textbook, a key resource for senior high school students under Indonesia's *Merdeka Curriculum*. The research investigates how target, source, and international cultures are portrayed, assessing their role in fostering intercultural communication skills. Using qualitative content analysis, supported by quantitative insights, the study applies frameworks to evaluate cultural content. The textbook achieves a numerical balance on target culture (32%), source culture (36%), and international culture (32%). However, it lacks depth in cultural exploration. Target culture often centers on basic practices, source culture is fragmented, and international culture tends to focus on global challenges rather than meaningful intercultural exchanges. Themes such as environmental awareness, digital literacy, and financial management dominate, but opportunities for critical cultural dialogue are largely missed. These findings reveal that the textbook while promising, falls short of fully supporting students' intercultural competence due to superficial coverage and underrepresentation of minority cultures. The study highlights the need for richer, more inclusive cultural narratives, such as case studies and reflective tasks, to encourage deeper understanding and critical thinking. By addressing these gaps, educators and curriculum developers can create materials that better align with the *Merdeka Curriculum's* vision of contextual and meaningful learning. Furthermore, this study contributes to English language education by emphasizing the role of cultural representation in fostering students' intercultural competence, which is essential for effective communication in global context.

INTRODUCTION

The *Merdeka Curriculum* introduced by the Indonesian government plays a crucial role in transforming the education system, focusing on flexibility, competency-based learning, and character development. This curriculum aims to develop critical skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, collectively known as the 4Cs (Widodo, 2016). These competencies are essential for preparing students to face complex challenges in the 21st century. In this framework, The *Merdeka Curriculum* emphasizes both

linguistic and intercultural competence, preparing students for global communication while maintaining their local cultural identity.

Within this framework, English is not only treated as a subject but also as a tool to enhance global communication and competitiveness. The implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* reflects the government's efforts to balance academic competency with character development through learning that is relevant to society and workplace needs. As such, integrating English into this curriculum plays a crucial role in developing students who are adaptable and innovative, ready to face both local and global challenges. Mahmud (2019) emphasizes that integrating English into the curriculum not only equips students with essential linguistic abilities but also supports their readiness to navigate societal and workplace demands in a globalized context. This integration is further enriched by embedding cultural contexts that foster critical and reflective thinking, ensuring students are not only linguistically capable but also culturally aware in addressing the challenges of globalization.

In the process of learning the English language, the representation of cultural context plays a significant role in creating meaningful learning experiences for the students, especially from international students perspectives (Kirkpatrick, 2017). Language cannot be separated from culture, as it reflects the values, norms, and ways of thinking of a society. For Indonesian students, integrating local cultural contexts in English learning materials can strengthen cultural identity while facilitating cross-cultural understanding. However, this alignment often contrasts with global trends, where Anglo-Saxon bias dominates EFL textbooks, leading to the underrepresentation of local cultures, as observed by (Moghaddam & Tirnaz, 2023). It also aligns with the *Merdeka Curriculum*'s principles, which emphasize the importance of contextual education relevant to students' social environment.

Despite the importance of integrating cultural perspectives, previous studies indicate that many English textbooks still prioritize Anglo-Saxon perspectives, leading to an imbalance in cultural representation (Moghaddam & Tirnaz, 2023). This study examines how cultural content is portrayed in the *English for Change* textbook, analyzing whether it supports students' intercultural competence. Therefore, learning the English language that considers cultural context can help students to become more open-minded and tolerant individuals who can contribute to the global community without losing their identity as citizens of Indonesia. Riadini & Cahyono (2021) emphasize that incorporating cultural content in English textbooks enhances students' intercultural communication competence, enabling them to engage effectively in global interactions while maintaining their cultural identity. By integrating both language skills and cultural awareness, students are better prepared to thrive in an interconnected world, balancing global and local perspectives.

As part of the *Merdeka Curriculum* implementation, the *English for Change* textbook is designed to support English language learning at the high school level. This book offers a learning approach that focuses on developing language competency through topics relevant to daily life and global challenges. One important aspect of this book is the representation of cultural context that is expected to connect students with their local experiences and realities. This textbook functions not only as a teaching material source but also as a tool to encourage students to think critically and reflectively about cultural issues (Astuti et al., 2022). By incorporating local and global cultural elements, *English for Change* is expected to build bridges between language learning and cultural awareness, so students are not only skilled in English but also able to understand and appreciate cultural diversity. In the context of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, this book is expected to be an effective means of supporting the achievement of national educational goals that emphasize contextual and relevant learning.

The representation of Indonesian culture in English language learning can provide significant benefits for High School students. Presenting local cultural contexts, students can

more easily connect foreign language concepts with their own experiences and environment. For example, texts or dialogues that depict traditional ceremonies, folklore, or daily life of Indonesian society provide familiarity that makes the material easier to understand. This not only increases students' interest in learning but also strengthens their cognitive skills in processing new information (Mahmud, 2019). Additionally, the use of local cultural contexts in English materials enables students to learn vocabulary, grammar, and expressions in situations relevant to their lives (Syahri & Susanti, 2016). By connecting language learning with local cultural contexts, students not only enhance their language skills but also gain a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage, which in turn helps them develop confidence in using English to explore and promote their culture in global contexts.

In particular, texts discussing batik or gamelan allow students to learn technical terms and idioms in English while deepening their knowledge about cultural heritage. In this way, local cultural representation acts as a bridge connecting English with students' cultural identity, helping them understand that language learning is not just about mastering linguistic skills but also about understanding different values and perspectives. Furthermore, this approach can build students' confidence in using English to narrate and promote their culture in international forums, making them competent cultural ambassadors.

Cultural representation in English textbooks has been a broad topic of study in language education. Various previous studies have explored how cultural elements are incorporated into teaching materials across different countries, such as Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, China, and Germany, and their impact on language learning. For instance, in Alshenqeeti (2020), Astiandani & Purwati (2021), Masturah et al. (2021), and Nurjanah & Umaemah (2019) studies stated that more target cultures are represented in the English language learning textbooks rather than local cultures. These textbooks focus more on giving examples from target cultures such as countries with English as their first language such as the United States of America and England. This is also shown in other studies including Keles & Yazan (2023), Baleghizadeh & Amiri Shayesteh (2020), Asakereh et al. (2019) that found more English textbooks focus on Western-centric and give examples in English native accents and topics, leaving more imbalance representative between target, local, and global cultures.

However, there are also English textbooks for example *Think Globally Act Locally* and *Bahasa Inggris Revision Edition* which was released by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic Indonesia, which focus on Indonesian cultures and topics with examples from the daily lives of Indonesian citizens. These textbooks were analyzed by Riadini & Cahyono (2021) and Salsabila & Susanto (2022) to highlight the importance of balanced cultural representation in building more comprehensive cross-cultural awareness.

These findings indicate that cultural representation in textbooks not only influences students' understanding of target cultures but also strengthens or weakens their own cultural identity. These studies show that students exposed to teaching materials with diverse cultural content show improvements in cultural awareness and intercultural communication competence. However, there are significant gaps in research regarding cultural representation in English textbooks in Indonesia, particularly in the context of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. While some local research, such as that conducted by Widodo (2016), has analyzed cultural representation in previous textbooks, and in-depth studies on how *Merdeka Curriculum* textbooks including *English for Change* represent local and global cultural contexts remain very limited. Additionally, the direct impact of these cultural representations on students' English language abilities in terms of speaking, reading, and writing skills, as well as their cross-cultural competence, has not been extensively researched.

This research aims to fill a critical gap in understanding how cultural diversity is represented in the *English for Change* textbook and its role in enhancing students' language proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills. By focusing on target, source, and

international cultural contexts, this study will assess how the textbook supports the *Merdeka Curriculum*'s goals of providing contextual and meaningful learning experiences.

This research aims to analyze cultural representation in the English textbook *English for Change* used at the Senior High School level within the framework of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. The main objective of this study is to identify and evaluate the extent to which local, national, and global cultural content is represented in the learning materials. Specifically, this research focuses on how this textbook reflects Indonesian cultural diversity and how these elements are integrated into English language learning. Additionally, this research aims to explore whether the cultural representation in this textbook supports the development of students' cross-cultural communication skills.

Thus, this study not only seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of cultural representation in the textbook but also to assess its effectiveness in facilitating contextual and meaningful language learning for Indonesian students. The results of this research are expected to provide relevant insights for curriculum developers, textbook authors, and educators in creating more inclusive and culturally relevant learning materials. The key question the researcher seeks to answer is: How are the culture-related contents portrayed in the English textbook for senior high school?

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design

This study uses qualitative content analysis in the perspective of textbook evaluation to explore the way culture-related content is portrayed in an English textbook titled *English for Change* for eleventh-grade high school students, published in 2022 by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. According to Krippendorff (2018) qualitative content analysis is described as a method for interpreting textual data through systematic coding to identify patterns, themes, or meanings, allowing researchers to make inferences from the data.

To facilitate understanding, quantitative analysis in the form of percentages was also used. The procedure of this study consisted of the following steps: First, the content analyzed includes reading texts, dialogues, and quotations, in accordance with the opinion of Berg (2007) who describes content analysis as a systematic and objective technique for analyzing written, verbal, or visual communication. It involves categorizing and organizing data in a structured way to allow for making inferences and drawing conclusions about the material being analyzed. The second step is the selection of the unit of analysis in the English textbook, where this study analyzes the entire chapter in the book.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of English textbooks used in Indonesian senior high schools under the *Merdeka Curriculum*. The selected sample is the *English for Change* textbook, published in 2022 by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This book, containing five chapters and 254 pages, was chosen because it serves as an official learning resource across Indonesia and aligns with the *Merdeka Curriculum*'s focus on contextualized and meaningful language learning.

This study specifically focuses on the *English for Change* textbook, an official instructional material for senior high school students under the *Merdeka Curriculum*. While this book is widely used, the findings of this study are limited to this specific textbook and do not necessarily reflect cultural representation in other English textbooks within the curriculum. Future research could explore additional textbooks to examine whether similar trends emerge in other instructional materials.

Instrument

The textbook was analyzed using the three categories of cultural information sources proposed by Cortazzi & Jin (1999), namely target culture, source culture, and international culture. The analysis further focused on the cultural content proposed by Byram (1993). The data were categorized based on Cortazzi & Jin's (1999) cultural framework, classifying content into target, source, and international culture. Each unit of analysis including reading texts, dialogues, and images was examined for cultural indicators. For instance, a passage on Indonesian traditional ceremonies was coded as source culture, while a discussion on Western digital literacy practices was classified as target culture.

Data Analysis

The categorization was conducted using a coding guide adapted from Byram's (1993) intercultural dimensions. The categorization of cultural content used in this analysis is listed in Table 1, with Cortazzi & Jin's (1999) approach used to describe the way cultural content is presented in the English textbooks.

Table 1
Categorization of the Cultural Contents

No	Category
1	Social identity and social groups (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities)
2	Social interaction (differing levels of formality)
3	Belief and behavior (moral, religious beliefs, daily routines)
4	Social and political institutions (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government)
5	Socialization and the life cycle (families, schools, employment, rites of passages)
6	National history (historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity)
7	National geography (geographic factors seen as being significant by members)
8	Stereotypes and national identity (what is "typical," symbols of national stereotypes)

(Byram, 1993 cited in Cortazzi & Jin, 1999, p. 203)

The texts in the textbook were then classified into the categories, and Byram's (1993) checklist was used in the content analysis procedure to assess the extent to which the cultural content in the book meets the needs of teaching culture in English language learning. As the object of research, the book *English for Change* was used, this is designed to support English learning at the senior high school (SMA) level in Indonesia presented in five chapters and 254 pages. The book is organized to support the development of students' language skills in the four aspects of language skills and also covers various other language components.

This textbook is prepared based on the *Merdeka Curriculum* approach, which emphasizes the development of communication skills through the context of daily life and global challenges. The book also integrates a genre-based approach that aims to help students understand and produce texts in various genres, in accordance with the basic competencies set out in the curriculum. The *English for Change* book was chosen because it is a book provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia for use in all high schools in Indonesia, so it is the main source in the English learning process that is relevant to the needs of contextualized language learning.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Research Findings

The analysis of cultural content representation in the *English for Change* textbook reveals a diverse yet unbalanced depiction of target, source, and international cultures. This section elaborates on three major findings, supported by data from the tables 2.

Table 2
The Depiction of Cultural Contents in the English Textbook

Category Code	Target Culture		Source Culture		International Culture		Total (f)	Total (%)
	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Code 1	1	4%	5	19%	4	17%	10	14
Code 2	3	13%	1	4%	1	4%	5	7
Code 3	3	13%	2	8%	3	13%	8	11
Code 4	5	22%	4	15%	1	4%	10	14
Code 5	4	17%	6	23%	1	4%	11	15
Code 6	4	17%	2	8%	6	26%	12	17
Code 7	1	4%	4	15%	4	17%	9	12
Code 8	2	9%	2	8%	3	13%	7	10
Total	23	32%	26	36%	23	32%	72	100%

1. Uneven Distribution of Cultural Contexts

The textbook integrates cultural contexts across the target (32%), source (36%), and international (32%) cultures, but the distribution varies significantly in thematic and instructional content.

a. Target Culture Representation: Dominates in several chapters but often in a superficial manner. For instance, lessons on digital literacy (Chapter 1) highlight politeness expressions and agreeing/disagreeing strategies, reflecting surface-level target cultural practices without deeper insights into societal norms or values. Similarly, environmental education in Chapter 2 highlights practices such as recycling in the U.S. and U.K., emphasizing procedural knowledge rather than cultural nuances.

b. Source Culture Representation: Predominantly revolves around visible cultural practices and local contexts. The program *Bank Sampah* and local environmental initiatives provide a glimpse into Indonesian practices, but deeper socio-cultural implications are not thoroughly explored. Anecdotal inclusions, for example, quotes from Indonesian athletes and leaders, provide relatable yet fragmented portrayals of source culture.

c. International Culture Representation: Largely centers on global challenges and campaigns. Chapters *Healthy Life for a Healthy Future* and *Love Your Environment* focus on universal issues such as obesity and plastic pollution. Although these topics foster global awareness, they lack emphasis on specific intercultural exchanges or comparisons.

The distribution across all categories, which are target (32%), source (36%), and international cultures (32%), demonstrates numerical balance but fails to ensure qualitative equity. Chapters such as *Indonesian Environmental Figures* and *Personal Money Management* depict international culture primarily through global movements and trends rather than through explicit comparative analyses or intercultural dialogue. Although the numerical distribution appears balanced (target culture 32%, source culture 36%, international culture 32%), the depth of representation varies significantly. Target culture is often depicted at a surface level, focusing on common expressions and politeness strategies, while source culture primarily highlights visible cultural artifacts without a deeper exploration of societal norms. International culture, meanwhile, is mostly introduced through global issues rather than direct cultural comparisons or interactions.

2. Limited Depth in Cultural Exploration

While the textbook attempts to incorporate diverse cultural perspectives, the depth of exploration varies:

a. Surface-Level Practices: Activities such as identifying social media post purposes (Chapter 1) or discussing recycling procedures (Chapter 2) focus on functional language and tasks, with limited attention to cultural implications. For example, the mention of Greta Thunberg's activism (Chapter 4) serves more as a topic for discussion than an opportunity to critically explore environmental activism's cultural dimensions.

b. Missed Opportunities for Intercultural Learning: The textbook includes multiple references to international agreements and global campaigns (e.g., Earth Hour, Paris Agreement). However, it does not delve into how these initiatives impact or are influenced by cultural differences. Similarly, discussions on local initiatives, such as deforestation in Indonesia, lack comparative insights to global practices.

c. Tokenism in Source and Target Culture: Inclusion of prominent figures such as Maudy Ayunda or images of Indonesian landscapes provides representation but risks tokenism by not connecting these elements to broader cultural themes. For example, Maudy Ayunda's leadership discussion (Chapter 1) could have been contextualized within Indonesia's gender and leadership dynamics.

While the representation breadth is commendable, the lack of cultural depth undermines the textbook's potential to foster intercultural competence. A stronger focus on deeper cultural meanings and practices would enhance the textbook's educational value.

3. Themes and Genres in Cultural Integration

The thematic analysis reveals patterns in how cultural contexts are woven into the textbook:

a. Environmental Themes: Chapters *Love Your Environment* and *Indonesian Environmental Figures* extensively cover environmental issues across all three cultural contexts. Target culture references include advanced recycling systems in the U.S. and U.K., while source culture contributions highlight local efforts such as "Bank Sampah." International culture integrates global agreements and campaigns, promoting universal awareness but often with an ecological, rather than a cultural, lens.

b. Digital Literacy and Globalization: Chapter 1 reflects the pervasive influence of digital media and globalization. Lessons involve international influencers and collaborative online platforms, offering insights into modern digital practices. However, these are often limited to tool-based learning rather than exploring cultural variations in digital communication norms.

c. Health and Lifestyle: In *Healthy Life for a Healthy Future,* the textbook juxtaposes dietary habits and health recommendations from different cultures. Yet, it tends to emphasize Western perspectives (e.g., food pyramids, research studies) over comparative local practices, which could have enriched the intercultural narrative.

d. Socioeconomic Themes: Chapters on personal finance (e.g., *Personal Money Management*) include cultural contrasts in financial habits. These discussions highlight practical financial tips but lack contextualization regarding underlying cultural values such as frugality or community-centered savings systems in Indonesia.

Cultural content predominantly appears in the form of factual descriptions, quotes, and procedural tasks. The absence of narrative elements or reflective tasks limits students' ability to engage deeply with cultural themes. For example, including case studies or role-playing scenarios could provide richer, more immersive experiences.

Table 3
The Sample of the Depiction of Cultural Content in the English Textbook

Chapter	Topic	About (Picture/text)	Section	Page	Cultural Information	
					Type	**Code**
1	Digital Literacies and My Identities	A study of politeness expressions and the use of "agreeing" and "disagreeing" in interactions	Listening	5	Target culture	TC.2 (1)
		Aan Mansyur's quote on writing difficulties and the creative process	Reading	22	Source culture	SC.1 (1)
		Picture of Greta Thunberg and discussion on her role as a global environmental activist	Writing	31	International culture	IC.6 (1)
2	Love Your Environment	Environmental education taught in schools in English-speaking countries, such as in the US or UK, which includes waste separation and recycling programs	Listening	47	Target culture	TC.4 (1)
		Indonesia's "Bank Sampah" program that teaches people to sort waste	Listening	47	Source culture	SC.4 (3)
		Plastic waste management issues faced by countries around the world, including English-speaking countries	Speaking	62	International culture	IC.6 (3)
3	Healthy Life for a Healthy Future	Video from an English-language country source on the raw food vs cooked food debate	Speaking	107	Target culture	TC.2 (2)
		Text about healthy morning eating habits using food combinations such as local fish	Listening	103	Source culture	SC.1(4)
		A discussion of the benefits of sleep for health around the world, with data from various international studies	Reading	116	International culture	IC.6 (4)
4	Indonesian Environmental Figures	Environmental education in English-speaking countries	Listening	143	Target culture	TC.5 (4)
		Melati Wijsen and Isabel Wijsen lead the Bye Bye Plastic Bags campaign in Bali	Reading	152	Source culture	SC.1 (5)
		International movement for sustainability	Speaking	148	International culture	IC.3 (3)
5	Personal Money Management	Activities to read about saving tips that are common in western culture, such as "never grocery shop when	Viewing	211	Target culture	TC.6 (4)

		hungry"				
		Cost comparison between online and in-person shopping in Indonesia, such as food prices	Speaking	191	Source culture	SC.8 (2)
		Text a procedure on how to buy train tickets online, highlighting the convenience of global technology	Writing	222	International culture	IC.7 (4)

Discussion

Cultural representation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks is pivotal in shaping students' intercultural communicative competence, as emphasized in Byram's (1993) model of intercultural communication. This study reveals a diverse yet unbalanced depiction of target, source, and international cultures in the *English for Change* textbook, which aligns with and diverges from findings in previous research.

In Indonesia, studies by Syahri & Susanti (2016) show that EFL textbooks often reflect a predominant focus on local culture, with 60% of material content featuring Indonesian culture. Similarly, this study found source culture to be the most represented (36%), albeit lacking depth. For instance, the inclusion of the *Bank Sampah* initiative aligns with Syahri and Susanti's findings but it misses deeper socio-cultural exploration. Globally, Moghaddam & Tirnaz (2023) identified an Anglo-Saxon bias in global EFL textbooks, with local cultures comprising only 25% of the content. By contrast, the *English for Change* textbook achieves a numerical balance among target, source, and international cultures (32%, 36%, and 32%, respectively). However, similar to findings by Keles & Yazan (2023) whose conducted research in New Headway textbook, the lack of integrated global cultural narratives limits the students' intercultural perspectives.

Moreover, this study echoes Widodo's (2016) observation that while Indonesian Ministry-approved textbooks include multicultural themes, they often lack exploratory approaches. For example, while the *English for Change* textbook introduces global issues for example Greta Thunberg's activism, it focuses on surface-level discussions rather than fostering intercultural dialogue. The unbalanced cultural representation has significant implications for students' intercultural competence development (Agustina & Kencana, 2023). The textbook's heavy reliance on surface-level practices such as discussing recycling in the U.S. or Indonesia reflects a trend noted by Astiandani & Purwati (2021), where cultural representation prioritizes functional knowledge over deeper cultural understanding. This approach limits students' ability to critically analyze cultural nuances and engage in meaningful cross-cultural interactions.

While the textbook includes global campaigns like Earth Hour and the Paris Agreement, it misses an opportunity to explore these issues from a cultural perspective. The discussion around topics like plastic waste focuses on the problem, but not on how different cultures address it. For example, comparing Indonesia's approach to sustainability with that of countries like Brazil or India could give students a broader view of how cultural values influence environmental practices. This would not only deepen their understanding of global challenges but also encourage them to appreciate the diverse ways in which different cultures approach these problems.

Another area where the textbook could improve is in its portrayal of cultural diversity, especially when discussing practical topics like *Personal Money Management*. While it presents Western financial habits, such as saving techniques, it overlooks cultural practices in other parts of the world. Many Indonesian communities, for example, have unique approaches to savings that focus on communal efforts rather than individual accumulation.

As noted by Riadini & Cahyono (2021), this lack of representation of local practices limits students' ability to recognize and value different cultural perspectives. By including a wider range of financial habits from various cultures, the textbook could offer a richer, more inclusive view of the world.

Based on these findings and prior studies, textbooks should strive for a more integrated and exploratory approach to cultural representation. Following the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions proposed by Cortazzi (2013), the inclusion of narrative-based tasks and real-world case studies would provide students with immersive experiences that promote critical thinking and intercultural communication. For instance, incorporating reflective activities about Maudy Ayunda's leadership within the context of Indonesia's gender dynamics could deepen students' understanding of both source and target cultures. Additionally, adapting Astuti et al (2022) project-based approach could encourage students to actively compare local and global cultural elements, fostering a more nuanced appreciation of cultural diversity. By balancing source, target, and international cultures more effectively, textbooks can better prepare students to navigate the complexities of intercultural communication in a globalized world.

To address these gaps, curriculum developers should consider integrating more case studies and reflective tasks into future textbooks. For example, instead of merely describing environmental efforts in Indonesia, a case study comparing waste management strategies in Indonesia and Germany could be included. This approach would enable students to critically analyze how cultural values influence environmental policies. Furthermore, incorporating interactive activities such as student-led discussions on cultural stereotypes or digital collaboration projects with international peers could enhance their intercultural competence. By shifting towards a more dynamic and participatory learning model, textbooks can better fulfill the goals of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in fostering globally competent students.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that while the *English for Change* textbook demonstrates numerical balance in representing target, source, and international cultures, its depth remains limited. Findings highlight the dominance of surface-level practices, imbalanced intercultural exploration, and tokenism in source and target culture representation. The study aligns with previous research, which also identifies similar challenges in English textbooks in Indonesia and other countries. Limited cultural depth may hinder students' development of intercultural competence. Therefore, a more holistic approach is needed to enhance multicultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills by incorporating richer and deeper cultural explorations.

Addressing these limitations requires a shift toward more dynamic and participatory learning materials. Future textbooks should not only balance cultural representation but also integrate meaningful intercultural interactions. By embedding case studies, reflective tasks, and interactive discussions, textbooks can better support students in developing a nuanced understanding of cultural diversity. Ensuring that students engage critically with cultural content will enhance their ability to navigate global and local contexts effectively, aligning with the goals of the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

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